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(INTELLIGENCE)

(BY ROBERT SHEPARD)

WASHINGTON (UPI) -- CRITICS OF A SENATE BILL TO BAR PUBLIC IDENTIFICATION OF U.S. INTELLIGENCE AGENTS SAID TODAY PART OF THE PROBLEM FOR AGENTS ABROAD IS THAT THE CIA DOES NOT GIVE THEM ADEQUATE "COVER."

"OUR JOB IS NOT TO TAMPER WITH THE FIRST AMENDMENT BUT TO FIX THE SYSTEM," SAID SEN. PATRICK LEAHY, D-VT.

BUT CIA DIRECTOR WILLIAM CASEY SAID LEGISLATION MAKING IT A CRIMINAL OFFENSE TO REVEAL AGENTS' IDENTITIES IS "ESSENTIAL TO THE MAINTENANCE OF A STRONG AND EFFECTIVE INTELLIGENCE APPARATUS."

UNAUTHORIZED DISCLOSURES, CASEY TOLD A SENATE JUDICIARY SUBCOMMITTEE, "HAVE RESULTED IN UNTOLD DAMAGE AND, IF NOT STOPPED, WILL RESULT IN FURTHER DAMAGE TO THE EFFECTIVENESS OF OUR INTELLIGENCE APPARATUS AND, HENCE, THE NATION ITSELF."

CASEY AND OTHER SUPPORTERS OF THE BILL INSISTED IT WAS CONSTITUTIONAL AND WOULD NOT INTERFERE WITH THE RIGHTS OF THE PRESS OR OTHERS IN LEGITIMATE PURSUIT OF INFORMATION.

LEAHY SAID HE SUPPORTS MOST PROVISIONS OF THE BILL, BUT THAT ONE SECTION GOES TOO FAR AND "COULD MEAN THE EFFECTIVE END OF ALL MEANINGFUL DISCOURSE ABOUT INTELLIGENCE."

REPRESENTATIVES OF THE AMERICAN CIVIL LIBERTIES UNION SAID THE ISSUE "IS NOT DISCLOSURES MADE BY THE PRESS OR PUBLIC BUT THE FAILURE TO PROVIDE ADEQUATE COVER FOR OUR INTELLIGENCE OFFICERS ABROAD."

THE ACLU QUOTED FROM A REPORT BY THE CONSERVATIVE HERITAGE FOUNDATION THAT SAID: 'THE 'OFFICIAL COVER' PROVIDED TO OFFICERS OF THE CENTRAL INTELLIGENCE AGENCY, USUALLY BY THE DEPARTMENT OF STATE, IS ROUTINELY INADEQUATE TO WITHSTAND ALL BUT THE MOST CURSORY OF INSPECTIONS."

THE ACLU STATEMENT, BY JERRY BERMAN AND MORTON HALPERIN, SAID IT IS CLEAR 'THAT THE SCOPE OF THE BILL WOULD COVER LEGITIMATE NEWSGATHERING ACTIVITY AND PUBLIC DEBATE ON IMPORTANT INTELLIGENCE AND FOREIGN POLICY ISSUES."

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